

Building Preservation Coalitions

A section of the Preservation by Design conference of special interest to planners consisted of two panels entitled "Building Preservation Coalitions." Speakers drawn from fields as diverse as land trusts and affordable housing described the shared concerns which have increasingly inspired them to join forces in the name of preservation. In the following section, three DCRP alumni discuss their experiences with coalition building and how efforts have succeeded in their own communities.

Land Trusts: Focusing Limited Resources on Common Interests

Kathleen A. Blaha

This article discusses the importance of land trusts and other locally-based preservation and conservation organizations to resource protection. Through coordinated efforts, such organizations can and should play a vital role in the education of local citizenries, and the creation of a broad-based constituency for the conservation of land, the preservation of historical structures and landscapes, and the assurance of sensible land use decisions.

The idea of coalition building is not new to those who work in the nonprofit environmental sector. Limited financial resources and an agenda calling for a change in public policy requires strong coalitions, critical to accomplishing public goals. If leadership among environmental advocates is focused on common issues, the opportunity for making change is far more likely.

Coalition building between the environmental and historic preservation fields has few examples despite numerous similarities in their efforts to preserve the built and the natural environment. Unfortunately, the limited public funding available for land acquisition and historic preservation is often a source of competition between such groups.

Historic preservationists and land conservationists are separately forming coalitions in North Carolina to propose statewide protection and funding alternatives. However, if stable, long-range sources of support are to be established, the efforts of both environmentalists and preservationists must be united in one broad-based platform.

Environmental and historic preservation organizations in North Carolina are beginning to understand the value of combining organizational strengths

to meet common goals, particularly in support of stable funding sources for resource protection. In order to encourage and develop communication between the two fields, common goals must be set and pursued. Historic preservationists and land conservationists can strengthen their efforts through coalitions which seek larger, more comprehensive strategies for resource protection backed by a broad-based, well-educated and better-funded constituency.

Building Coalitions Through Project Work

Since 1973, the Trust For Public Land, a nonprofit conservation organization, has worked nationally to create parks and open space opportunities for permanent public use. In 1987, the Trust became part of a coalition to save one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made in North America. While clearing land for an office complex in Tallahassee, Florida, developers unearthed the first conclusive evidence of the 1539 Hernando de Soto Expedition which landed in Florida and traveled through what are now 10 southeastern states. The site occupies nearly five acres and is located less than two miles from the Florida State Capitol Building. When the Trust was asked



State Archaeologist, Calvin Smith (far right) and volunteers at the Tallahassee, Florida de Soto site

to assist in protecting the de Soto site, it was in danger of being developed despite its national significance, because no public monies were available to purchase the site.

The de Soto site became the Trust's first archaeological preservation project. The Trust stepped in and purchased the land based on a commitment from the State of Florida that the property could be reconveyed to the state once funding was available. After the Trust took title to the property, it created an effective coalition of environmental and historic preservation organizations, archaeological conservancies, state agencies and national organizations. Substantial private and public monies were raised for the land's acquisition and archaeological excavation, as well as the stabilization of the Governor Martin Home, a National Historic Register site also on the property. Furthermore, legislation was set in place that created a statewide emergency archaeological revolving fund to handle future crises.

The Trust played a leadership role in taking on the project and assuming title to the land, but its expertise in understanding the significance of the archaeological finds and the historic importance of the site was limited. The success of the project rested on the network of information and expertise created by the coalition.

The coalition immediately saw that the de Soto discovery offered them an opportunity to do more than secure one site. The size and breadth of the coalition

allowed goals for the project to be broadened to create a permanent funding mechanism for acquiring archaeological sites which might otherwise be lost to development. Furthermore, the coalition solidified a new network among conservationists, preservationists and archaeologists in educating the public to the need of protecting our heritage.

Land Trusts

The Trust for Public Land has been building constituencies for the preservation of environmental resources since the mid-1970s, primarily through the creation of land trusts. Land trusts are local nonprofit corporations that organize around community goals of historic and open space preservation and provide sensible land use and environmental education. Nationwide, hundreds of land trusts participate actively in the protection of their community's resources. Because of these organizations' local focus and roots, they are able to stay in tune with changes in land use. They can set realistic goals, modify them according to changing circumstances and respond quickly when opportunities arise.

Collectively, the nation has over 700 land trusts which have protected over 300,000 acres through outright ownership and over 400,000 acres through the use of conservation easements or deed restrictions. These protection efforts range from agricultural easements for the

preservation of farmland, to outright acquisition of endangered lands and historic sites and the acquisition and management of urban parks and gardens.

The real strength of land trusts lies in their collective ability to build constituencies and educate the public on key issues, thus creating opportunities for more comprehensive and long-term solutions to protecting our heritage.

Building Coalitions Among Land Trusts

Resource protection, whether it be for endangered habitats, city parkland, historic structures or archaeological sites, requires constituencies created by local land trusts.

Historically, resource protection has been the province of government, but with shrinking public dollars and increased controversy over the management of our natural and historic resources, the ability of government to act as the sole guardian of these resources is rapidly diminishing. Local private advocacy efforts are supplementing, and in many cases serving as substitutes for, government action.

Local organizations are flexible and can work quickly and efficiently in a familiar setting; in addition, they are self-motivated and self-reliant.

In 1982, the California Coastal Conservancy, a quasi-public agency established as a steward for the protection of coastal resources in California, created the Nonprofit Assistance Program partially as a result of one local community's successful partnership with the state on a northern California park project. In 1978, the state proposed a 10-mile coastal park in Humboldt County which condemned the property of 33 separate landowners. Local landowners strongly rejected the proposal, which called for strict public ownership of the park. In turn, the land trust proposed an alternative plan which included a mix of public and private uses, preserving the natural resources that were threatened while also recognizing the community's goals. The land trust then proceeded to negotiate two key acquisitions for the state, both bargain purchases, that resulted in a \$400,000 savings to the state. Through a combination of tax benefits, locally devised management solutions and conservation easements which allowed continued private ownership in certain cases, the Land Trust was able to negotiate these "less than market-value" purchases.

Since 1982, the Conservancy has expanded the Nonprofit Assistance Program based on the enormous success and financial savings attributed to the contributions of land trusts. Not only has the Conservancy achieved many of their resource protection goals for coastal communities, but dozens of nonprofit organizations are now working together with the Conservancy in a strong coalition to propose state policy on coastal resource protection.

Building Long-Term Coalitions

Education and coalition building are critical to the accomplishment of preserving land, protecting historical structures and encouraging sensible land use. Education of local residents about the importance of natural and historic resources in their community enables them to act in protecting those resources. Coalitions strengthen the collective actions of these citizens and take the goal of environmental protection and enhancement one step further toward a collective consensus among many communities.

Two outstanding examples of coalitions in North Carolina are the Historic Preservation Foundation's network of revolving funds to provide emergency funding for historic structures and sites, and the North Carolina Coastal Federation's network of local environmental advocates in each of the coastal counties. The effectiveness of the Preservation Foundation and the Coastal Federation is based on a comprehensive approach to problem-solving and policy-making that has long-term implications beyond one or two local projects. The Federation and the Foundation provide leadership for education on vital resource protection issues, while local organizations bring together a constituency necessary to win long-term policy changes.

Coalition building among resource protection organizations in North Carolina must also cross the lines between preservationists and environmentalists, between urban open space advocates and farmland preservation efforts, and between endangered habitat protection and neighborhood revitalization. The growing number of local historic and environmental preservation organizations can use these collective community concerns to address statewide policy and funding issues. More organizations with similar protection goals do not threaten existing efforts; rather, they strengthen the constituency that is changing not only local but state policy priorities.

The Historic Preservation Foundation's 1988 Annual Meeting focused on the need for coalitions between preservationists and environmentalists in directing the destiny of preservation in the state. The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program and the Trust for Public Land are taking the next step and have scheduled two workshops in the spring of 1989 which will focus on the "how-to's" of program- and coalition building for land trusts.

These workshops, and the coalition-building that emerges from them, should begin to empower local land trusts and historic preservation organizations in North Carolina to develop strategies that jump ahead of problems and propose new policies. □

Kathleen A. Blaha is a project manager with the Southeast Regional Office of the Trust for Public Land and a graduate of the University of North Carolina's Department of City and Regional Planning.